

## **EXHIBIT F**



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**Auger et al.**

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(54) **SOCER SHOE HAVING INDEPENDENTLY SUPPORTED LATERAL AND MEDIAL SIDES**

D387,892 S 12/1997 Briant

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(Continued)

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**Prior Publication Data**

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(58) **Field of Search** ..... 36/128, 126, 67 R,  
36/67 A, 67 B, 67 C, 134, 67 D

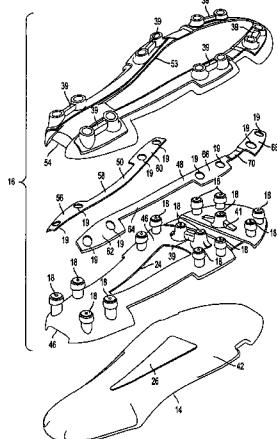
**Primary Examiner**—Ted Kavanaugh**(74) Attorney, Agent, or Firm**—Banner & Witcoff, Ltd.**References Cited****ABSTRACT****U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

A soccer shoe includes an upper and a cleat assembly coupled to the upper. The cleat assembly further includes a medial support bar located on the medial side and a lateral support bar located on the lateral side. A portion of the cleat assembly located near a midfoot section of the medial support bar is stiffer than a portion of the cleat assembly located near a midfoot section of the lateral support bar. The medial support bar extends approximately from a region corresponding to the rear of the calcaneous of a properly fitted wearer to approximately the head of the first metatarsal of the wearer. The lateral support bar extends approximately from a region corresponding to the rear of the calcaneous of the wearer to approximately the head of the fifth metatarsal of the wearer. The cleat assembly is bonded to a cushioning midsole formed from heated and compressed ethylene vinyl acetate foam. The upper lacks a full-length lasting board and is bonded directly to the cushioning midsole. A lining covers a padded collar and extends inside a foot-receiving region of the shoe, with a portion of the foot-receiving region around a wearer's heel being substantially free of discontinuities.

**30 Claims, 13 Drawing Sheets**

**US 6,973,746 B2**

Page 2

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U.S. Patent

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 1 of 13

US 6,973,746 B2

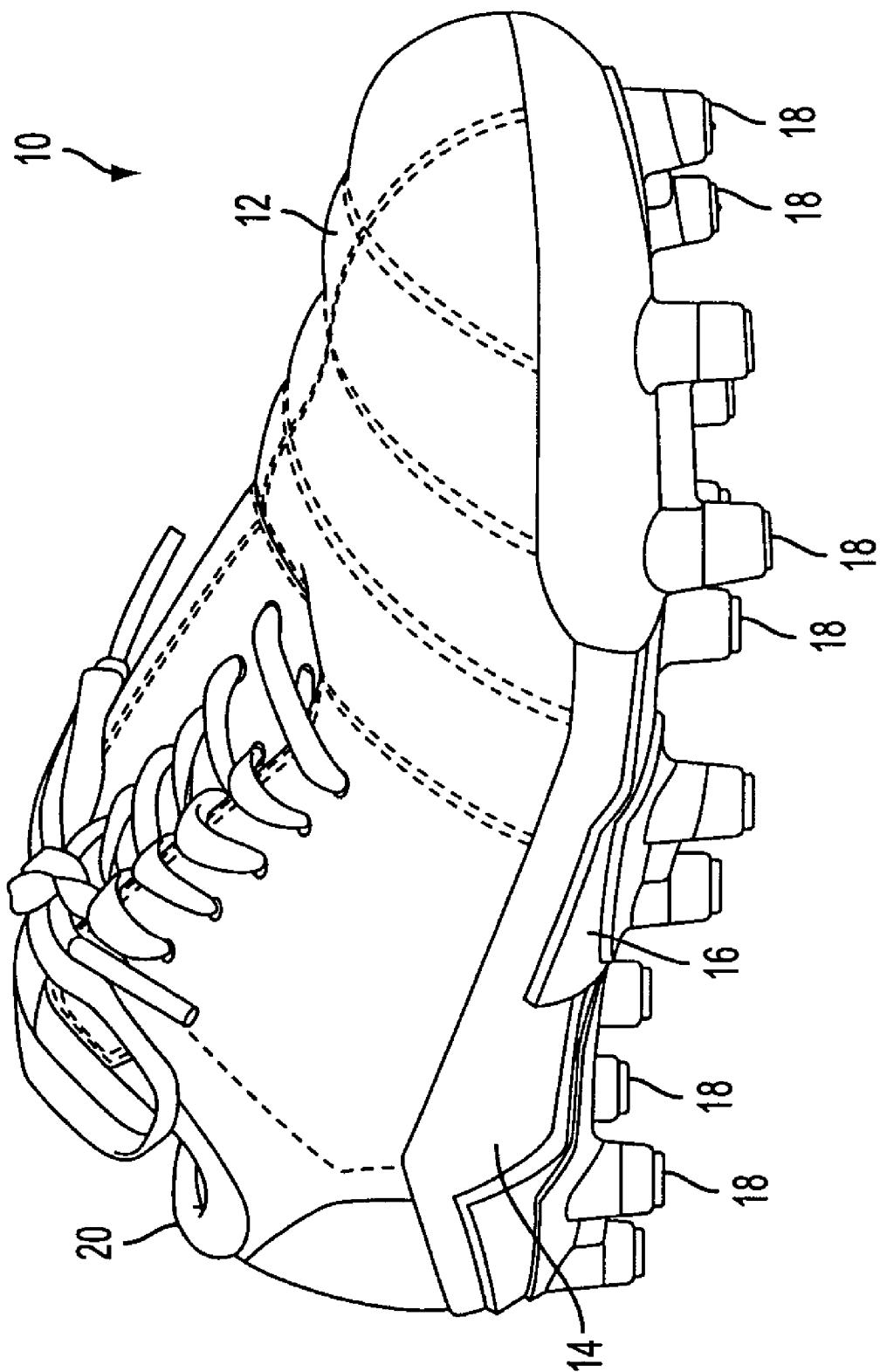


FIG. 1

U.S. Patent

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 2 of 13

US 6,973,746 B2

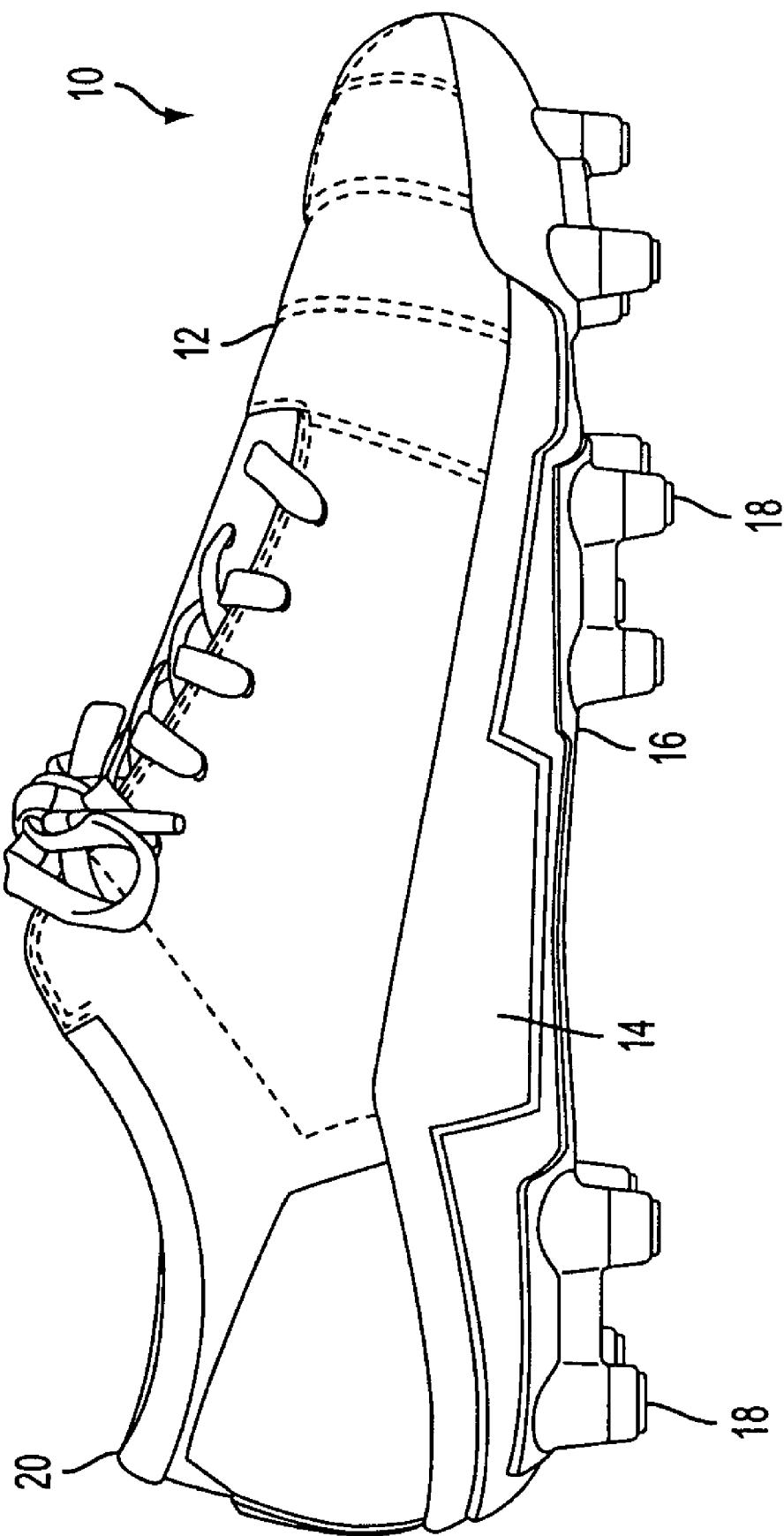


FIG. 2

U.S. Patent

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 3 of 13

US 6,973,746 B2

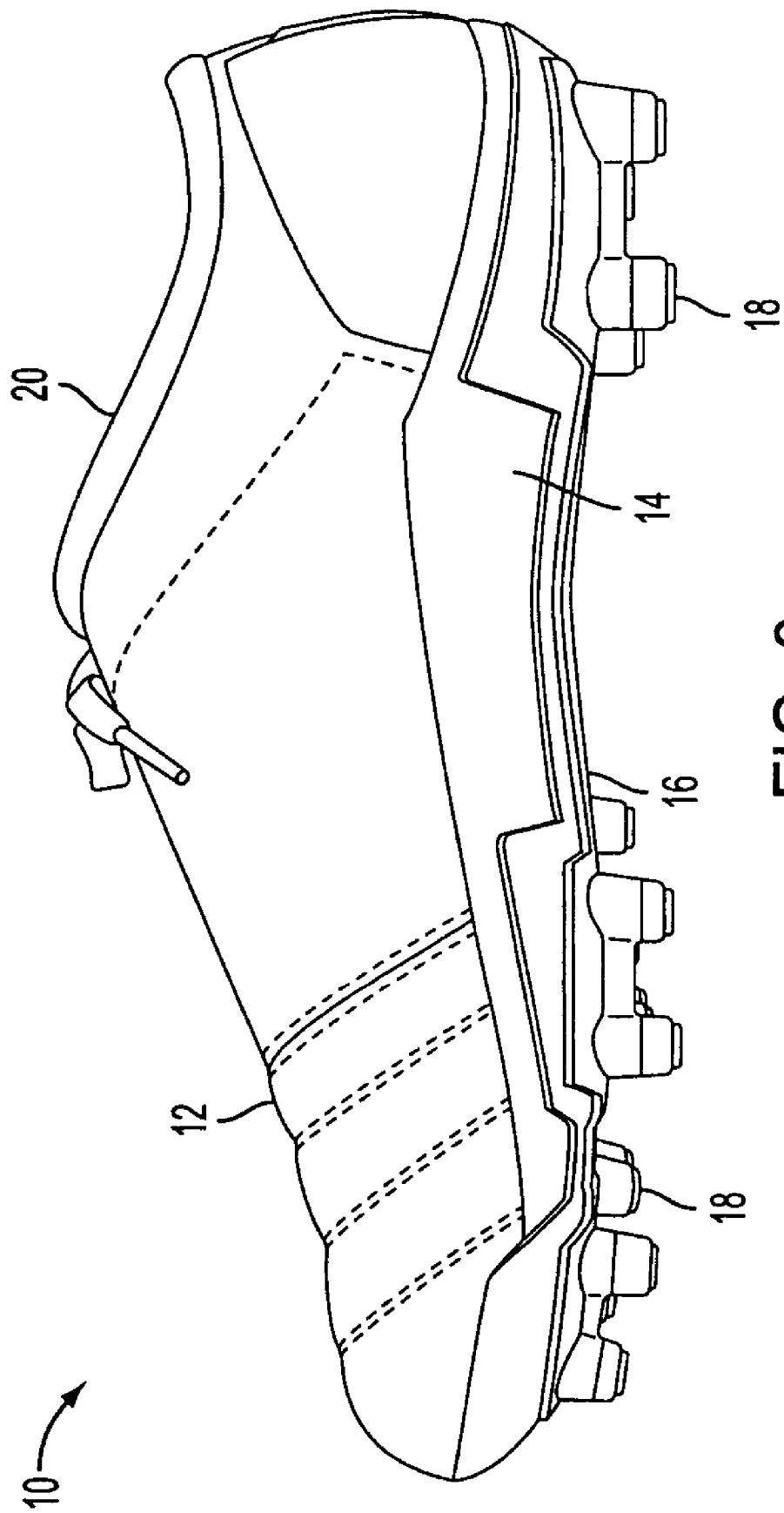


FIG. 3

U.S. Patent

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 4 of 13

US 6,973,746 B2

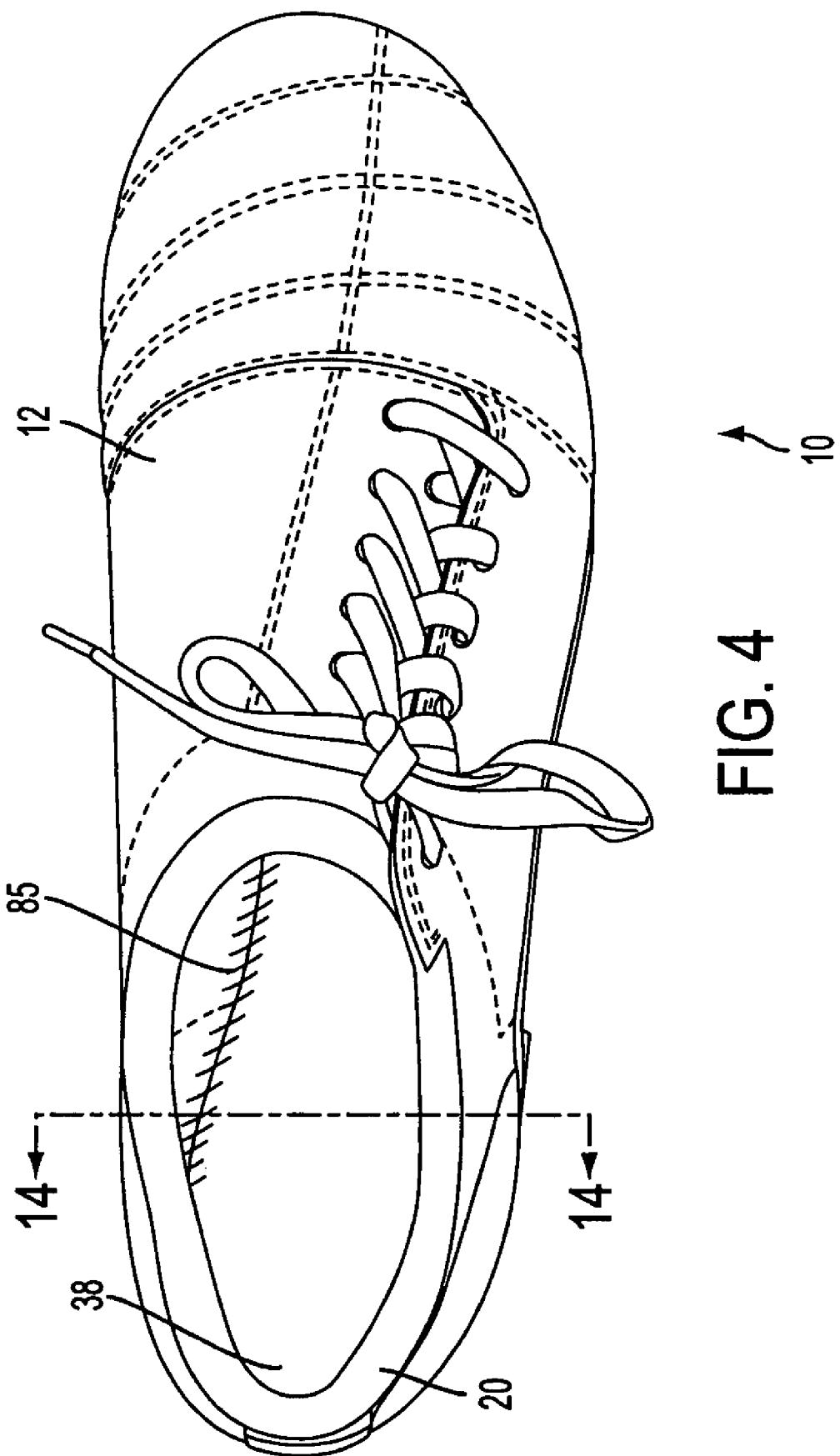


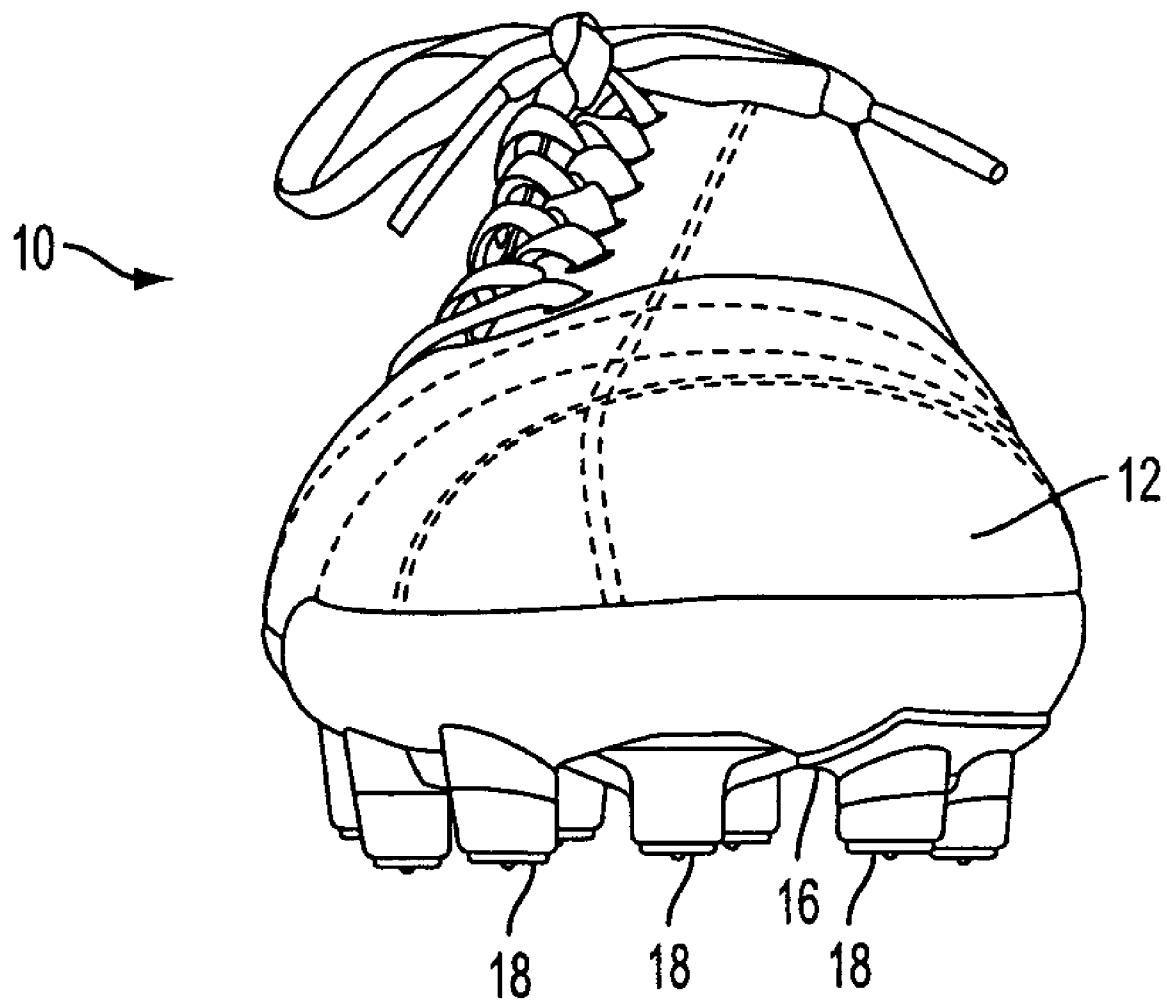
FIG. 4

**U.S. Patent**

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 5 of 13

**US 6,973,746 B2**



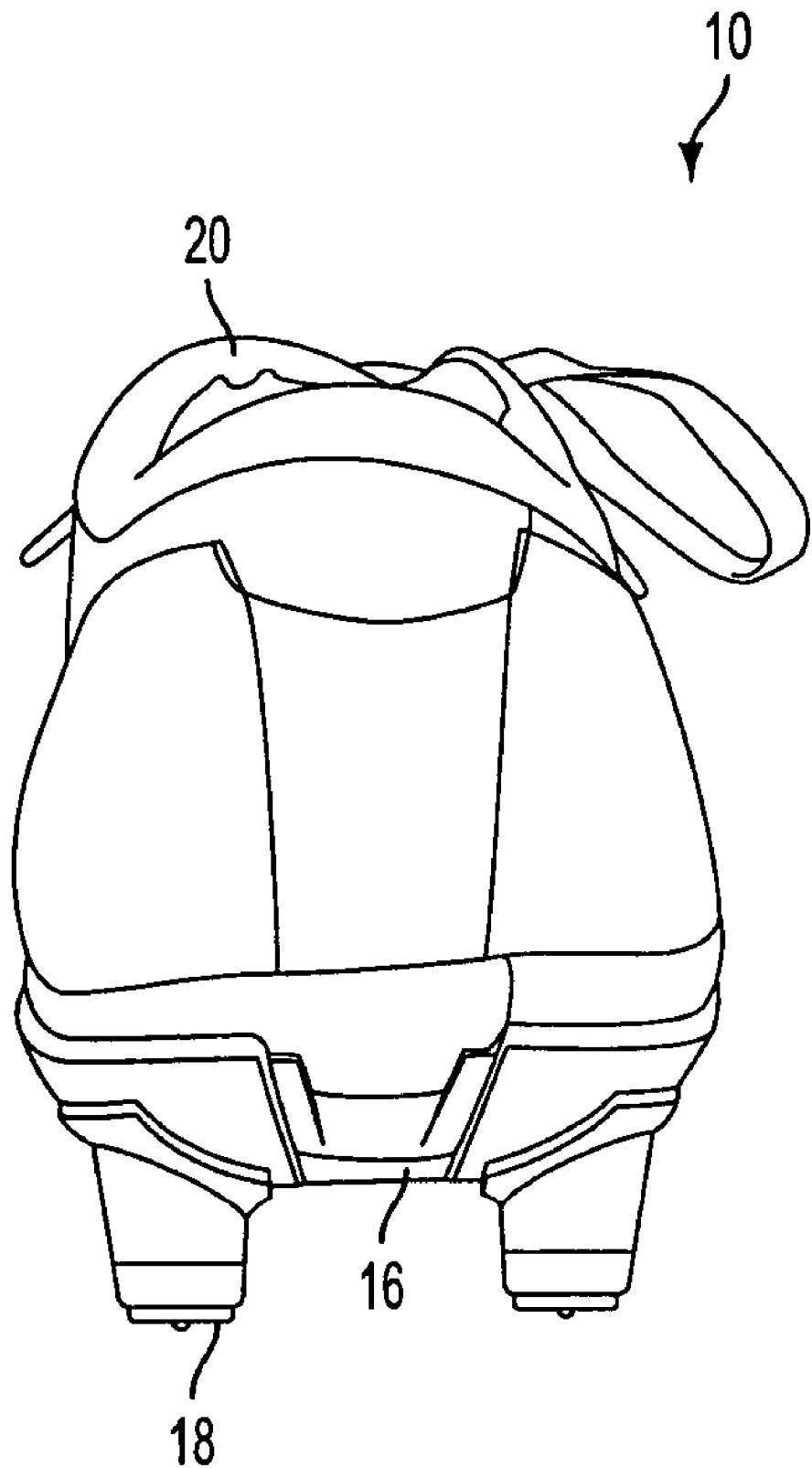
**FIG. 5**

**U.S. Patent**

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 6 of 13

**US 6,973,746 B2**



**FIG. 6**

U.S. Patent

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 7 of 13

US 6,973,746 B2

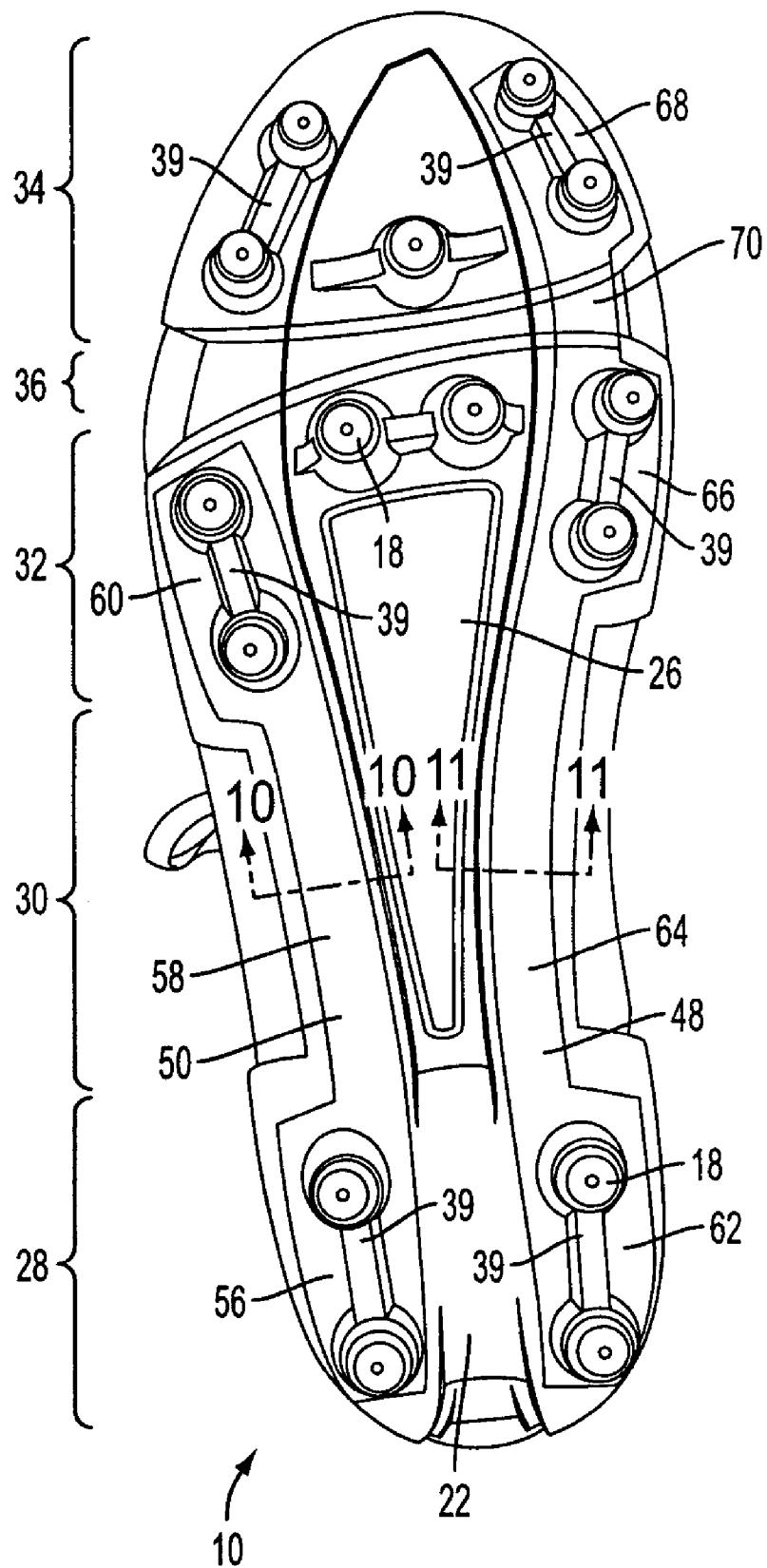


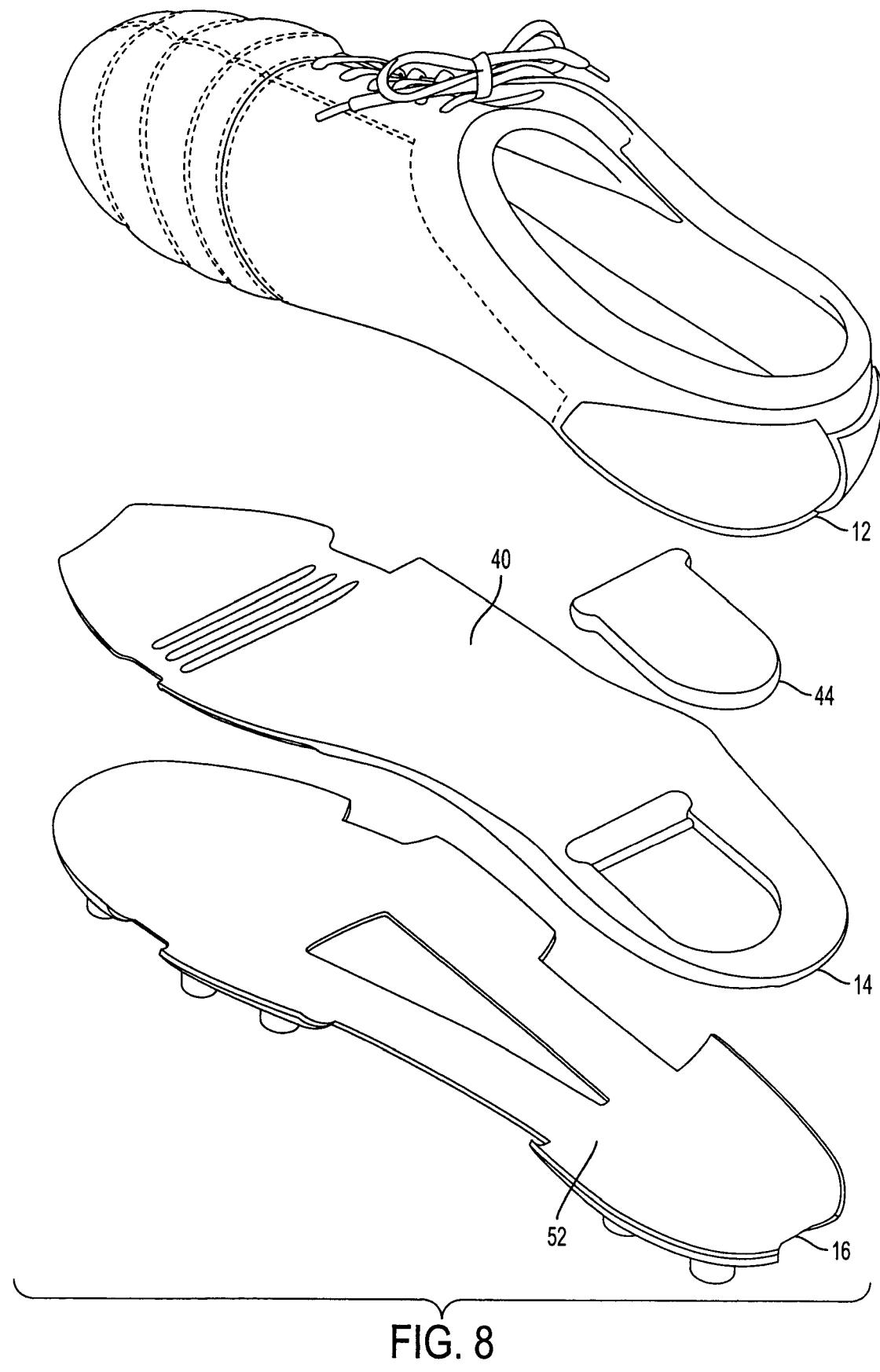
FIG. 7

**U.S. Patent**

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 8 of 13

**US 6,973,746 B2**

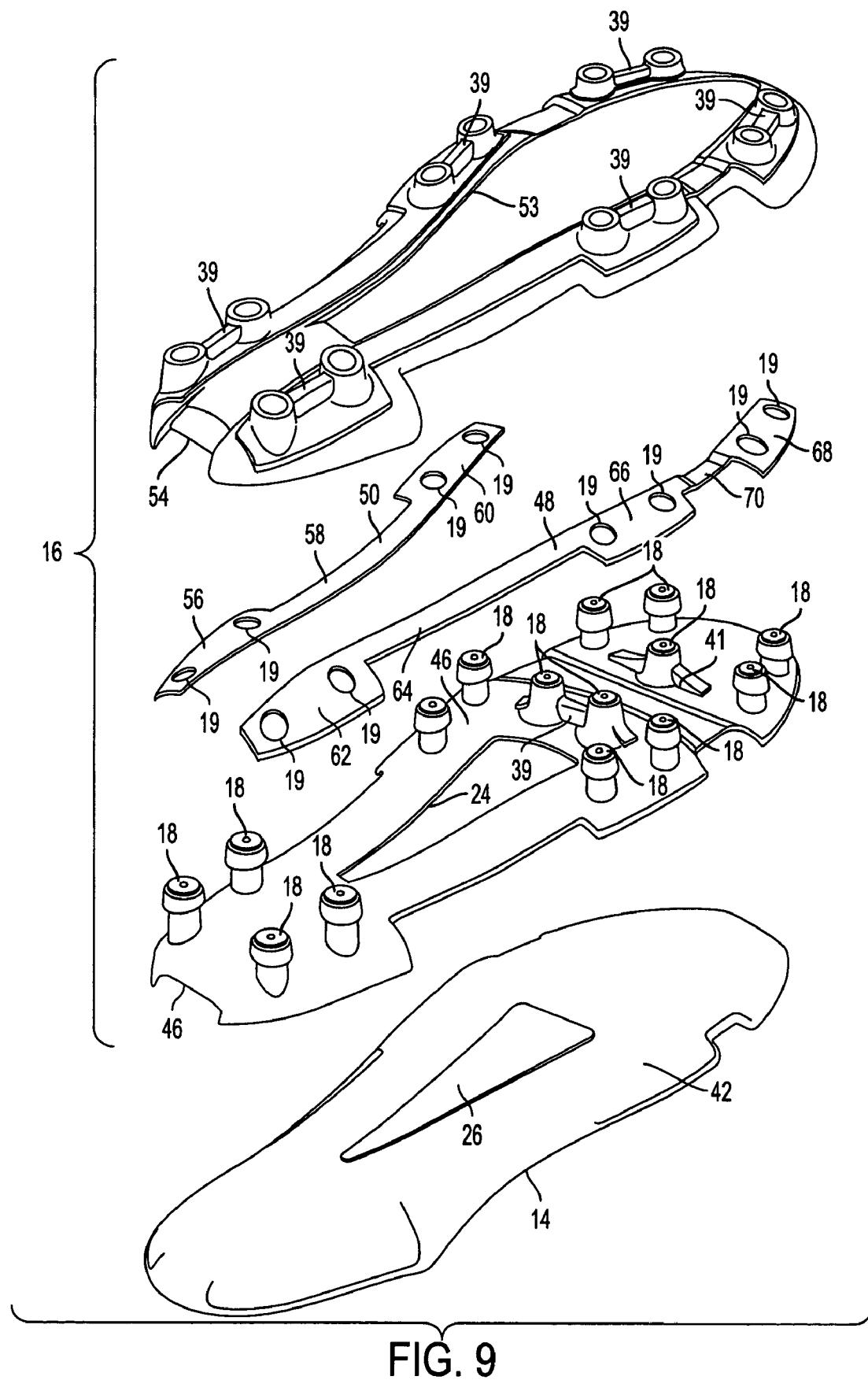


U.S. Patent

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 9 of 13

US 6,973,746 B2

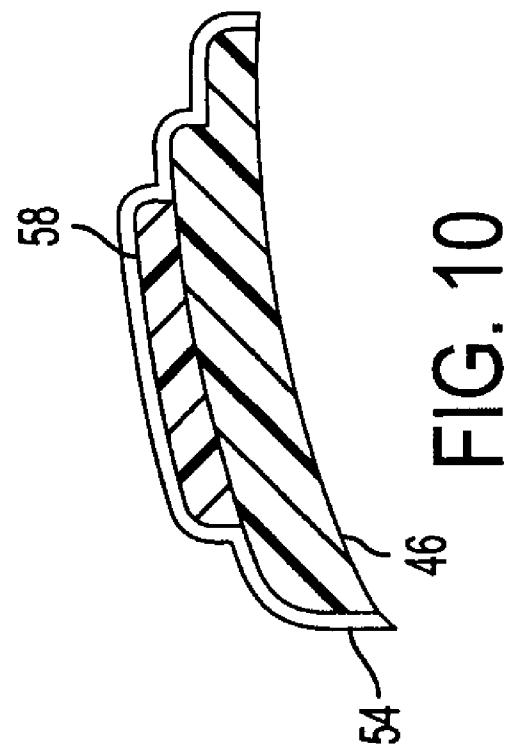
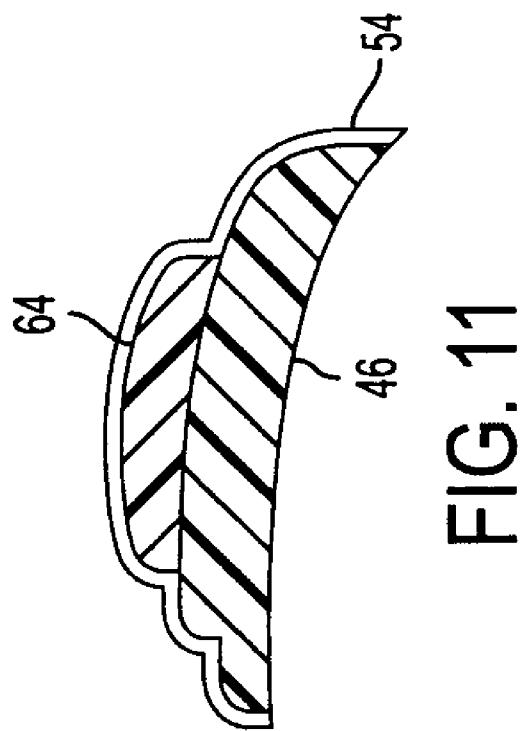


**U.S. Patent**

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 10 of 13

**US 6,973,746 B2**

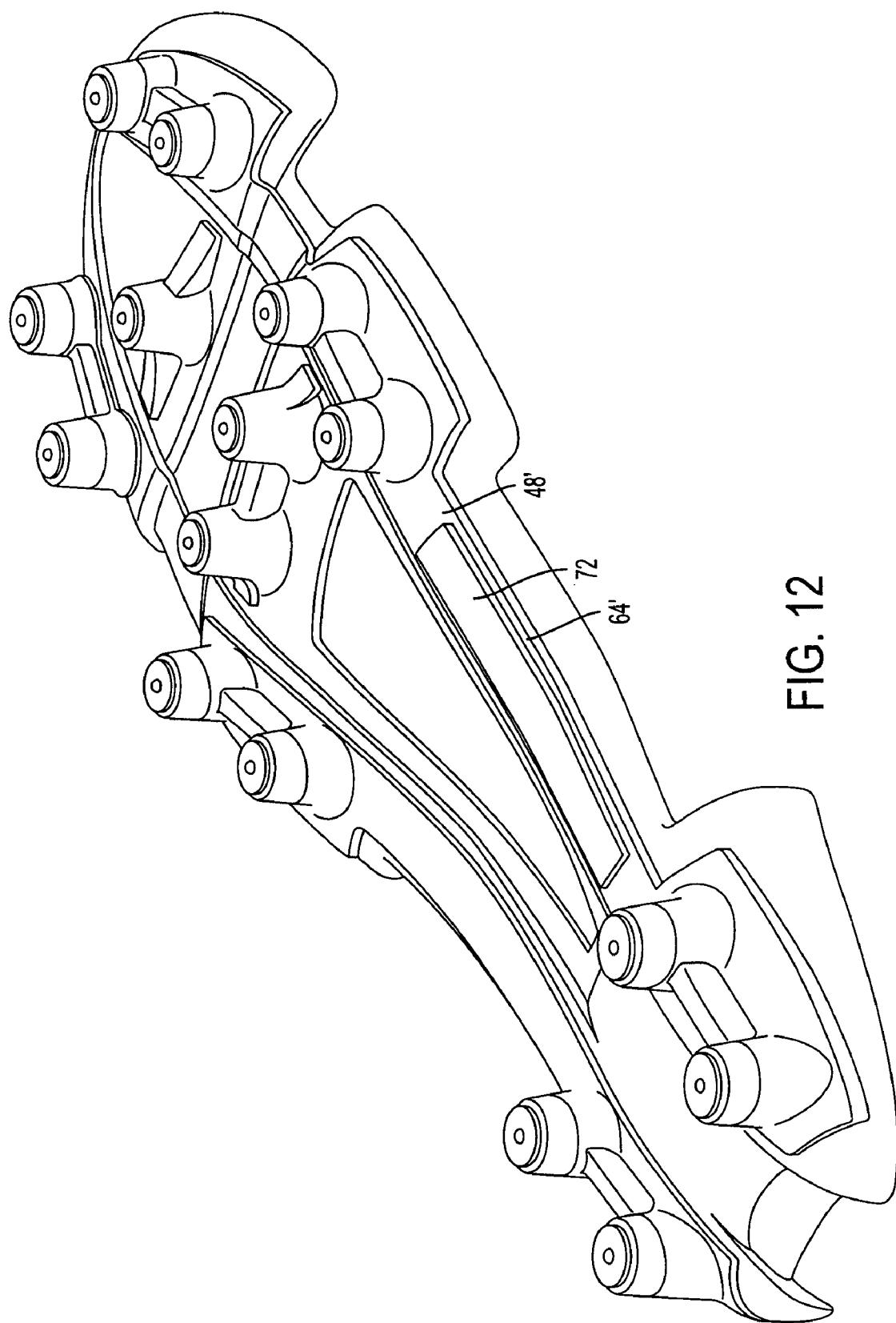


**U.S. Patent**

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 11 of 13

**US 6,973,746 B2**

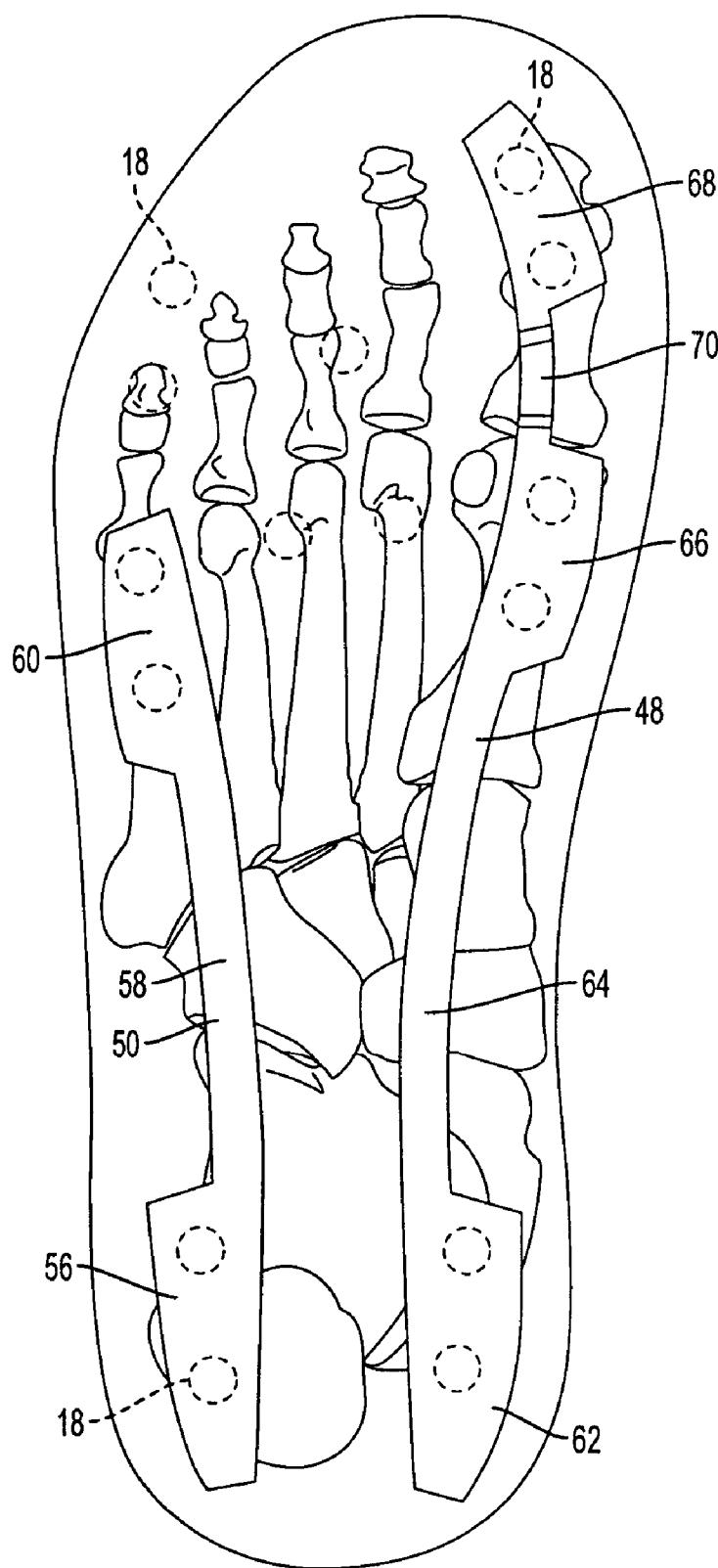


**U.S. Patent**

Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 12 of 13

**US 6,973,746 B2**



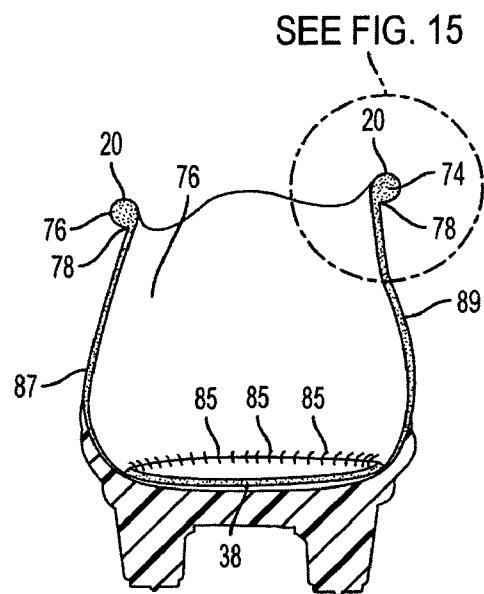
**FIG. 13**

**U.S. Patent**

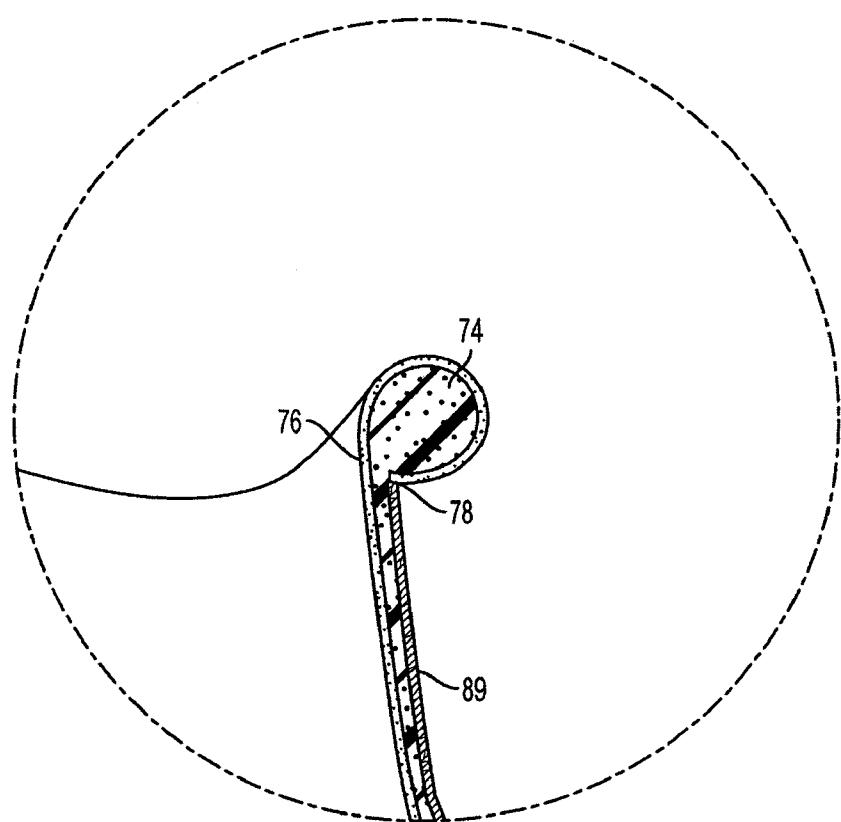
Dec. 13, 2005

Sheet 13 of 13

**US 6,973,746 B2**



**FIG. 14**



**FIG. 15**

US 6,973,746 B2

**1**
**SOCER SHOE HAVING INDEPENDENTLY SUPPORTED LATERAL AND MEDIAL SIDES**
**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention generally relates to a cleated article of footwear. More specifically, the invention relates to a cleated article of footwear designed to address motions prevalent in the sport of soccer so as to enhance performance and prevent injuries.

**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

The modern athletic shoe is a combination of many elements which have specific functions, all of which must work together for the support and protection of the foot during an athletic event. Cleated athletic shoes, particularly soccer shoes, typically include a sole having an upper extending upwardly from the sole and into which the foot of the athlete is positioned and secured in place. The sole provides traction, protection, and a durable wear surface. In addition, a plurality of cleats are secured to the sole and extend downwardly from it to provide the traction of the shoe when the athlete runs on a ground surface. The design of athletic shoes has rapidly become a refined science. However, the advancement of that science as to cleated footwear has in some ways been less rapid and less developed.

The sport of soccer imposes special demands upon player footwear. In the modern game, players run increasingly long distances. In a 90 minute match, a player may run as much as (or more than) 14 kilometers (over 8.5 miles). When practice sessions are also considered, a player may run in excess of 70 kilometers (43.5 miles) per week while wearing soccer shoes. It is thus important that soccer shoes be as comfortable as possible.

The presence of cleats on the shoe sole presents additional problems in this regard. Specifically, cleats can cause point pressures on a player's foot, particularly when the player is running over a frozen playing field or other hard surface. Moreover, the relatively long distances that a player must run, in combination with the side-to-side motions, foot-planting motions (for kicking a ball) and other common motions, can cause a player to become even more fatigued and injury prone than the player might be from running alone.

Significant advances have been made in the design of a cleated athletic shoe for the game of soccer. Commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/179,013 (titled Article of Footwear Having a Regional Cleat Configuration) describes different cleat designs for the lateral and medial portions of the shoe (particularly the sole) in order to enhance flexibility, balance control, propulsion, stability and support in the specific areas where needed. Commonly-owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/179,014 (titled Article of Footwear Having Medial and Lateral Sides with Differing Properties) also describes varying cleat designs for the medial and lateral regions in order to improve performance. However, further advantages can be achieved.

Pronation, or the rolling of a foot from the outside to the inside during running, is of special interest. In particular, pronation occurs as a runner's foot strikes the ground on the outside (or lateral) edge of the foot and the foot then rolls inward so as to place the inner (or medial) edge on the ground. A certain amount of pronation is natural and necessary for normal running. However, excessive pronation can lead to fatigue and injuries.

**2**
**SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

Accordingly, the present invention further addresses the above considerations. In particular, the invention provides a cleated article of footwear that controls the motion of a wearer's foot during running, and that increases comfort and reduces fatigue. In one embodiment, a soccer shoe includes an upper and a cleat assembly coupled to the upper. The cleat assembly further includes a base having medial and lateral sides, a plurality of downwardly extending ground engaging members, a medial support bar located on the medial side and a lateral support bar located on the lateral side. A portion of the cleat assembly generally located near a midfoot section of the medial support bar is stiffer than a portion of the cleat assembly generally located near a midfoot section of the lateral support bar. In at least one embodiment, the medial support bar extends approximately from a region corresponding to the rear of the calcaneous of a properly fitted wearer to approximately the head of the first metatarsal of the wearer. Similarly, the lateral support bar extends approximately from a region corresponding to the rear of the calcaneous of the wearer to approximately the head of the fifth metatarsal of the wearer.

In other embodiments, a soccer shoe includes a cleat assembly, a cushioning midsole bonded to the cleat assembly and an upper lacking a full-length lasting board. The upper is bonded directly to the cushioning midsole. The cushioning midsole can be formed from heated and compressed ethylene vinyl acetate foam, also known as Phylon. The invention may further include a padded collar element and a lining covering the collar and extending inside a foot-receiving region of the shoe, with a portion of the foot-receiving region around a wearer's heel being substantially free of discontinuities. These and other features of the invention will be apparent upon consideration of the following detailed description of preferred embodiments.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

**40** FIG. 1 is a lateral side perspective view of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**45** FIG. 2 is a lateral side elevational view of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**50** FIG. 3 is a medial side elevational view of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**55** FIG. 4 is a top view of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**60** FIG. 5 is a front view of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**65** FIG. 6 is a rear view of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**70** FIG. 7 is a bottom view of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**75** FIG. 8 is an exploded perspective view of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**80** FIG. 9 is an inverted exploded perspective view of outsole and midsole components of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

**85** FIG. 10 is a cross section taken along lines 10—10 of FIG. 7.

**90** FIG. 11 is a cross section taken along lines 11—11 of FIG. 7.

US 6,973,746 B2

## 3

FIG. 12 is an inverted perspective view of an outsole and midsole according to another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 13 is a bottom view of bones of a human foot with superimposed components of an article of footwear according to at least one embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 14 is a section taken along lines 14—14 of FIG. 4.

FIG. 15 is an enlarged view of the portion indicated in FIG. 14.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 is a lateral side perspective view of a cleated article of athletic footwear, for example a soccer shoe, according to at least one embodiment of the invention. Throughout this description, the article of footwear is generally referred to as shoe 10. As seen in FIG. 1, shoe 10 includes an upper 12. Upper 12 is attached to a midsole 14, which is in turn attached to a cleat assembly 16. Cleat assembly 16 includes multiple ground engaging members 18. When worn, ground-engaging members 18 provide traction to a player so as to enhance stability. FIG. 2 is a lateral side elevational view of shoe 10. When shoe 10 is worn, the lateral side of shoe 10 is generally oriented on the side facing away from the centerline of the wearer's body. FIG. 3 is a medial side elevational view of shoe 10. When shoe 10 is worn, the medial side generally faces toward the centerline of the wearer's body. FIG. 4 is a top view of shoe 10 (with no sock liner in place), and further shows upper 12. Upper 12 includes a padded collar 20. In at least one embodiment, upper 12 is tongueless, with the upper wrapping from the medial side of the wearer's foot, over the top of the foot, and under the lateral side portion of the upper. The laces of shoe 10 are located on the lateral side. FIGS. 5 and 6 are, respectively, front and rear elevational views of shoe 10.

FIG. 7 shows the outsole 22 of shoe 10. As seen more clearly in FIG. 9, a major portion of outsole 22 is formed by cleat assembly 16. In at least one embodiment, and as shown in FIGS. 8 and 9, cleat assembly 16 includes at least one open region 24. When cleat assembly 16 and midsole 14 are joined, outsole 22 thus includes the lower exposed surfaces of cleat assembly 16 and an exposed portion 26 of midsole 14 that is exposed by open region 24. The exposed portion 26 is centrally disposed in the midfoot and forefoot regions 30, 32 of the outsole 22; because the exposed portion 26 lies in a region of the outsole where less support is needed (and loads are generally lower), shoe 10 is made lighter by exposing a portion of midsole 14 in this manner. As seen in FIG. 7, outsole 22 has a heel region 28 which, when shoe 10 is worn by a properly fitted wearer, rests generally over the wearer's heel. Similarly, outsole 22 has midfoot, forefoot and toe regions 30, 32 and 34 that generally correspond to those portions of a wearer's foot. Extending across cleat assembly 16 from the lateral to medial sides, and located approximately between the forefoot and toe regions, is a flexure region 36. In the embodiment shown, flexure region 36 is formed by locally reducing the thickness of material from which cleat assembly 16 is formed.

FIG. 8 is an exploded perspective view of shoe 10 showing upper 12, air cushion 44, midsole 14 and cleat assembly 16. As seen in FIGS. 4 and 14, upper 12 is, in at least one embodiment, affixed to "Strobel sock" 38. Strobel sock 38 is roughly the shape of a wearer's foot, and closes the bottom of the upper. In at least one embodiment, Strobel sock 38 is Strobel stitched to upper 12 along the periphery of Strobel sock 38 with stitching 85 (FIGS. 4, 14). In that embodiment, a lasting board or other board-like member is

## 4

located in the toe region 30 proximal to the metatarsal heads of a wearer's foot, and does not extend beyond the forward-most portion of the Strobel sock. Upper 12 and attached Strobel sock 38 are adhesively bonded to the upper surface 40 of midsole 14 (FIG. 8). The lower surface 42 (FIG. 9) of midsole 14 is adhesively bonded to cleat assembly 16. In at least one embodiment, cleat assembly 16 and midsole 14 are first bonded before upper 12 is bonded to midsole 14. Although not shown in the FIGS., at least one embodiment 10 of shoe 10 includes a removable sock liner. As is known in the art, a sock liner conforms to and lines the inner bottom surface of a shoe and is the component contacted by the sole (or socked sole) of a wearer's foot.

Midsole 14 is, in one embodiment, a one-piece member 15 formed from a heated and compressed ethylene vinyl acetate (EVA) foam, also known as Phylon. In other embodiments, midsole 14 can be formed from polyurethane foam. Midsole 14 may also have a "skin" layer used for, e.g., coloring. In one embodiment, the thickness of midsole 14 varies from 20 approximately 4 to 6 mm in the heel region to approximately 2 to 3 mm in the toe region. Midsole 14 has a minimum height in forward portions of the side regions so as to be unobtrusive. Increased height in the midfoot regions provides additional support and cushioning. Situated between 25 midsole 14 and upper 12 is an air cushion 44. In at least one embodiment, air cushion 44 is a low profile air cushion having a height of approximately 5 mm. As seen in FIG. 8, air cushion 44 may rest in a depression formed in midsole 14. In at least one embodiment, the combined thickness of 30 midsole 14 and air cushion 44 is 8–10 mm.

FIG. 9 is an inverted exploded view of cleat assembly 16 and midsole 14. Cleat assembly 16 includes a base plate 46, medial support bar 48, lateral support bar 50 and connecting matrix 54. In at least one embodiment, ground engaging members 18 are formed as integral components of base plate 46, and extend through apertures 19 in support bars 48, 50 and through holes in connecting matrix 54. Connecting matrix 54 holds medial and lateral support bars 48 and 50, and includes an opening 53 exposing a central portion of 40 base plate 46. Base plate 46 provides a support structure for ground engaging members 18, as well as an upper surface area 52 (FIG. 8) for bonding to lower surface 42 of midsole 14. Although base plate 46 provides some support for the 45 foot of the wearer, base plate 46 is generally more flexible than medial and lateral support bars 48 and 50, as described below. In one embodiment, base plate 46 is molded from materials such as thermoplastic polyurethane (TPU) having a 92–98 durometer hardness. Connecting matrix 54 covers support bars 48 and 50 and portions of base plate 46. In at 50 least one embodiment, cleat assembly 16 is formed by first molding connecting matrix 54. Support bars 48 and 50 are then molded into connecting matrix 54. Finally, base plate 46 is molded into the already-formed connecting matrix 54 and support bars 48, 50. Connecting matrix 54 extends 55 beyond the peripheral edges of base plate 46 and is bonded to midsole 14 at the edges of base plate 46.

Medial support bar 48 and lateral support bar 50 are attached to (or embedded within) connecting matrix 54. Medial and lateral support bars 48 and 50 are, in at least one embodiment, formed from a material that is stiffer than the material from which base plate 46 is formed (e.g., for same-sized samples of the two materials under identical bending loads, the support bar material deflects less than the base plate material). In one embodiment, support bars 48 and 50 are formed from TPU having a higher modulus of elasticity than the material from which base plate 46 is formed. In other embodiments, support bars 48 and 50 are

## US 6,973,746 B2

5

formed from nylon. In still other embodiments, bars **48** and **50** may be formed from other materials, such as glass fiber reinforced plastic. Medial and lateral support bars **50** could also be formed from dissimilar materials, i.e., medial support bar **48** could be formed from a first material and lateral support bar **50** formed from a second material. After assembly, medial and lateral support bars **48** and **50** are completely enclosed by connecting matrix **54** and base plate **46**. In at least one embodiment, connecting matrix **54** is clear or translucent and is formed from TPU having a 95–98 durometer hardness. In the FIGS., connecting matrix **54** is treated as opaque so as not to unduly obscure the drawings. However, and as shown in FIGS. 1–7, matrix material **54** is also applied such that the outlines and shapes of support bars **48** and **50** are still visible. By forming connecting matrix **54** from a clear or translucent material and/or applying the material so as to reveal the shapes of support bars **48** and **50**, the support bars remain visible and apparent to a potential purchaser of shoe **10**. In other embodiments, connecting matrix **54** could be thicker, and/or medial and lateral support bars **48** and **50** could be completely embedded in connecting matrix **54** (i.e., no portion of bars **48** and **50** is contacted by base plate **46**). In still other embodiments, instead of separately forming medial and lateral support bars **48** and **50** in a preformed connecting matrix, the support bars could be formed as areas of increased thickness in the same areas of matrix **54** to which support bars **48** and **50** are added in the embodiments shown in the drawings. In still other embodiments, ground penetrating members **18** would not protrude through apertures in support bars **48** and **50**, but would instead be attached to the surfaces of support bars **48** and **50**. Ground penetrating members **18** could also be removable, with receptacle attachment points bonded to base plate **46**, support bars **48** and **50** and/or connecting matrix **54**. Ground penetrating members **18** could also be telescopic; examples of such ground penetrating members are described in published U.S. patent application 2003/0093925 (titled “Article of Footwear with a Ground-Engaging Member and Method of Altering a Ground-Engaging Member”).

As also seen in FIG. 9, ground-penetrating members may be joined by bridging elements **39**. Bridging elements **39**, which stabilize and stiffen the ground-engaging members that they join, may be formed as part of connecting matrix **54** and/or as part of base plate **46**. As shown in FIG. 9, at least one ground-engaging member **18** is stiffened by gussets **41** formed as part of base plate **46**.

As seen in FIGS. 7, 9 and 13, lateral support bar **50** includes a heel section **56**, a midfoot section **58** and a forefoot section **60**. Heel section **56** and forefoot section **60** are widened with respect to midfoot section **58**, and two ground engaging members **18** are located within each of those widened sections. Midfoot section **58** is slightly narrower than heel and forefoot sections **56** and **60**. Medial support bar **48** is longer than lateral support bar **50**, but also includes respective heel, midfoot and forefoot sections **62**, **64** and **66**. Medial support bar **48** further includes a toe section **68** and a flexure section **70**. As with lateral support bar **50**, the heel and forefoot sections **62** and **66** of medial support bar **48** are widened with respect to midfoot section **64** and two ground penetrating members **18** located within each of those widened sections. Midfoot section **64** (which may actually extend under the wearer's forefoot) is likewise narrower than adjacent heel and forefoot sections **62** and **66**.

Cleat assembly **16** includes medial and lateral stiffened sections that are generally located in regions corresponding to the midfoot sections **64** and **58** of respective medial and lateral support bars **48** and **50**. In some embodiments, this is

6

achieved by making midfoot section **64** of medial support bar **48** stiffer than midfoot section **58** of lateral support bar **50**. In particular, and as seen by comparing FIG. 10 (a cross section taken along lines **10**—**10** of FIG. 7) with FIG. 11 (a cross section taken along lines **11**—**11** of FIG. 7), midfoot section **58** of lateral support bar **50** (FIG. 10) is less thick than midfoot section **64** of medial support bar **48** (FIG. 11). In other embodiments, midfoot section **58** and midfoot section **64** are approximately the same thickness. In such embodiments, the portion of connecting matrix **54** overlaying midfoot section **64** (of medial support bar **48**) is thicker than the portion of connecting matrix **54** overlaying midfoot section **58** (of lateral support bar **50**). In that embodiment, and for male shoe sizes from 8 to 10, midfoot sections **58** and **64** are approximately 1.5 mm thick; the regions of base plate **46** under midfoot sections **58** and **64** are approximately 1.5 mm thick; the portion of connecting matrix **54** over midfoot section **58** is approximately 1.5 mm thick; and the portion of connecting matrix **54** over midfoot section **64** is approximately 3 mm thick. In larger shoe sizes, the component thickness are increased sufficient to maintain the stiffness of the medial and lateral stiffened sections across longer spans corresponding to larger shoe sizes.

In yet another embodiment shown in FIG. 12, an additional stiffening member **72** is attached to midfoot section **64** of medial support bar **48**. In that embodiment, stiffening member **72** is formed from a nickel-titanium alloy (nitinol) strip and bonded to (or embedded in) the outer portion of midfoot section **64** of medial support bar **48**. For a given stiffness of a support bar component, and assuming Young's moduli for nitinol of 41,000–75,000 Mpa and for TPU of 360 Mpa, it is estimated that the thickness of a support bar (or at least a midfoot portion thereof) could be reduced by approximately  $\frac{1}{5}$  if nitinol is used.

In other embodiments, the thickness of medial midsection **64** is not constant. By increasing the thickness of midsection **64** from heel toward the forefoot, for example, the stiffness of medial support bar midsection **64** also increases toward the forefoot. The thickness of lateral midsection **58** could likewise be non-constant.

Medial support bar **48** further includes a broadened toe section **68** joined to forefoot section **66** by flexure section **70**. Located in toe section **68** are two ground penetrating members **18**. Flexure section **70** coincides with flexure region **36** so that, overall, the coinciding portions are more flexible than other portions of cleat assembly **16**. In at least one embodiment, lateral and medial support bars **50** and **48** are not connected other than by their common attachment to base plate **46** and by connecting matrix **54**. In other words, no integral extensions of either support bar join the two bars, and no other bars or support members bridge support bars **48** and **50**.

FIG. 13 shows medial and lateral support bars **48** and **50** and ground engaging members **18** overlaid on the foot bones of a properly-fitted wearer of shoe **10**. Support bars **48** and **50** are positioned to comfortably support the wearer. Lateral support bar **50** extends from beneath the rear side of the wearer's calcaneous (heel bone) to approximately the end of the wearer's fifth metatarsal. Medial support bar **48** extends from beneath the rear side of the wearer's calcaneous and along the first metatarsal to the first distal phalanges (the bone of the big toe). Notably, the majority of ground engaging members **18** are located within medial and lateral support bars **48** and **50**. In this manner, support bars **48** and **50** provide additional bracing for ground-engaging members **18** on the edges of the wearer's foot. Moreover, support bars

## US 6,973,746 B2

7

**48** and **50** are located near the outside edges of the wearer's foot and placed and sized to predictably control foot motion.

As the wearer runs, the lateral edge of the foot will typically strike the ground first. As the wearer moves forward and continues to put more weight on the foot, the natural motion of the foot causes the foot to roll inward toward the medial side, thus flattening out the sole on the ground. By increasing the stiffness of appropriate sections of a medial portion of cleat assembly **16**, the flattening out of the foot (i.e., pronation) is reduced.

According to another aspect of the invention, comfort is increased for the wearer of shoe **10** by reducing points of irritation around the wearer's ankles (where collar **20** of shoe **10** may be tightly cinched around the wearer's foot) and around the sides of the wearer's heels. Because a soccer player may run 70 km or more per week in his or her soccer shoes, exposed stitching and other discontinuities in these regions can become irritating to the wearer. By reducing these discontinuities around the heel and under the collar, wearer comfort can be enhanced. FIG. **14** is a cross section of shoe **10** taken along lines **14**—**14** of FIG. **4**. So as not to obscure FIG. **14** with unnecessary details, separate sections for the various components of midsole **14** and cleat assembly **16** are not shown. As seen on the left side of FIG. **14** (which corresponds to the lateral side of shoe **10**), upper **12** includes a lateral exterior portion **87**, an inner lining **76** and padding **74**. Similarly, the right side of FIG. **14** shows medial exterior portion **89**, padding **74** and lining **76**. FIG. **15** is an enlarged view of the portion indicated by the broken line circle in FIG. **14**, and schematically illustrates inner lining **76**, padding **74** and exterior portion **89**. In one embodiment, lining **76** is a single piece and is attached to exterior portions **87**, **89** at seam **78**. Padding **74** is situated between lining **76** and exterior portions **87**, **89**, and is secured in place with adhesive. A bead is formed in padding **74** by seam **78**, thereby creating collar **20**. Padding **74** thins toward Strobel sock **38**. In the embodiment shown, lining **76** extends to (and is sewn by) stitching **85** that attaches Strobel sock **38** to exterior portions **87**, **89** of upper **12**. Lining **76** covers an interior area of shoe **10** generally corresponding to the heel counter, and forms an area around the inside heel area of shoe **10** that is substantially free of stitching, seams or other potentially irritating discontinuities. Forward of the heel counter, lining **76** continues below collar **20** (although not necessarily all the way to Strobel sock **38**) so as to continue the discontinuity-free region in the area around the portion of shoe **10** that is cinched tightly around a wearer's ankle. In one embodiment, a closed-cell high density foam material such as ethylene propylene diene monomer (EPDM) is used to form padding **74**. In other embodiments, padding **74** is BU synthetic or neoprene foam. Lining **76** is a polyurethane-coated polyester in one embodiment.

Midsole **14**, because it is formed from a heated and compressed EVA foam or similar material, is sufficiently stiff so as to provide support for the wearer's foot. However, the residual compressibility of the material also provides cushioning. By eliminating a full-length lasting board or other firm full-length insole material, and by bonding the Strobel sock directly to the cushioning midsole (except in the region of air cushion **44**), wearer comfort is substantially enhanced. In comparison of a shoe according to the invention with more conventional designs having a full-length firm insole, stud pressure caused by ground engaging members is believed to be reduced. Moreover, the invention reduces reliance upon a sock liner to provide most of the

8

cushioning from stud pressure. Typically, sock liners have a life that is shorter than the remainder of the shoe.

While the various features of shoe **10** work together to achieve the advantages previously described, it is recognized that individual features and sub-combinations of these features can be used to obtain some of the aforementioned advantages without the necessity to adopt all of these features.

While particular embodiments of the invention have been shown and described, it is recognized that various modifications thereof will occur to those skilled in the art. Therefore, the scope of the herein-described invention shall be limited solely by the claims appended hereto.

We claim:

**1.** An article of footwear, comprising:

an upper; and

a cleat assembly coupled to the upper, the cleat assembly including:

a base having medial and lateral sides,

a plurality of downwardly extending ground engaging members,

a medial support bar located on the medial side,

a lateral support bar located on the lateral side,

a lateral stiffened section located in a region of the cleat assembly generally corresponding to a midfoot portion of the lateral support bar, and

a medial stiffened section located in a region of the cleat assembly generally corresponding to a midfoot portion of the medial support bar, the medial stiffened section being stiffer than the lateral stiffened section.

**2.** The article of footwear of claim **1**, wherein the medial and lateral support bars are formed separately from the base and attached to the base.

**3.** The article of footwear of claim **1**, further comprising a connecting matrix, wherein:

the connecting matrix overlays at least a portion of the base, and

the lateral and medial support bars are disposed between the connecting matrix and the base.

**4.** The article of footwear of claim **3**, wherein the portion of the connecting matrix in the medial stiffened section is thicker than the portion of the connecting matrix in the lateral stiffened section.

**5.** The article of footwear of claim **1**, wherein the midfoot section of the medial support bar is thicker than the midfoot section of the lateral support bar.

**6.** The article of footwear of claim **1**, wherein the medial and lateral support bars are outwardly visible.

**7.** The article of footwear of claim **6**, further comprising a clear or translucent connecting matrix overlaying the medial and lateral support bars.

**8.** The article of footwear of claim **6**, further comprising a connecting matrix overlaying the medial and lateral support bars so as to reveal the shapes of the medial and lateral support bars.

**9.** The article of footwear of claim **1**, wherein:  
the medial support bar extends approximately from a region corresponding to the rear of the calcaneous of a properly fitted wearer of the article to approximately the head of the first metatarsal of the wearer, and  
the lateral support bar extends approximately from a region corresponding to the rear of the calcaneous of the wearer to approximately the head of the fifth metatarsal of the wearer.

## US 6,973,746 B2

**9**

**10.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein at least the midfoot sections of the medial and lateral support bars are stiffer than the base.

**11.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein the medial support bar midfoot section comprises a supplemental stiffening element.

**12.** The article of footwear of claim **11**, wherein the supplemental stiffening element comprises a nickel-titanium alloy strip.

**13.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein the cleat assembly is open in at least a portion of the midfoot region.

**14.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein the base includes a cross-sole flexure region extending from the lateral side to the medial side in a forward forefoot region.

**15.** The article of footwear of claim **14**, wherein the lateral support bar terminates on a heel side of the flexure region and the medial support bar comprises a flexible extension within the flexure region and a phalangeal support coupled to the flexible extension.

**16.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein a majority of the ground engaging members are integral to the base and protrude through the support bars.

**17.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein the lateral support bar and the medial support bar are stiffer than any portion of the base coupling the lateral and medial support bars.

**18.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein the lateral and medial support bars are free of integral connecting members.

**19.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein the lateral and medial support bars comprise thermoplastic polyurethane.

**20.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, wherein the lateral and medial support bars comprise a glass fiber reinforced plastic.

**21.** The article of footwear of claim **9**, further comprising a cushioning midsole bonded to the base, and wherein the upper lacks a full-length lasting board and is directly bonded to the cushioning midsole.

**22.** The article of footwear of claim **21**, wherein the cushioning midsole comprises a closed-cell compressed foam element.

**10**

**23.** The article of footwear of claim **22**, further comprising an air cushion, wherein:

the cushioning midsole comprises toe and heel regions, the air cushion is generally located in the heel region between the midsole and the upper,

the foam element is approximately 2–3 mm thick in the toe region, and

the combined thickness of the foam element and air cushion is approximately 8–10 mm.

**24.** The article of footwear of claim **22**, wherein the cushioning midsole comprises heated and compressed ethylene vinyl acetate foam.

**25.** The article of footwear of claim **22**, wherein the upper comprises a peripherally-stitched Strobel sock.

**26.** The article of footwear of claim **22**, wherein the upper further includes:

a padded collar element,

a lining covering the collar and extending inside a portion of a foot-receiving region of the article, the portion of the foot-receiving region being substantially free of discontinuities around the heel of a wearer.

**27.** The article of footwear of claim **22**, wherein the midfoot section of the medial support bar is thicker than the midfoot section of the lateral support bar.

**28.** The article of footwear of claim **22**, wherein the medial support bar midfoot section comprises a supplemental stiffening element.

**29.** The article of footwear of claim **22**, wherein the lateral support bar terminates on the heel side of a cross-sole flexure region, the cross-sole flexure region extending from the lateral side to the medial side in a forward forefoot region, and the medial support bar comprises a flexible extension within the cross-sole flexure region and a phalangeal support coupled to the flexible extension.

**30.** The article of footwear of claim **29**, wherein a majority of the ground engaging members are integral to the base and protrude through the support bars.

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